

Learning Activities

Guided Discussion Forums

Discussion is the instructional strategy most favored by adult learners because it is interactive and encourages active and participatory learning. It is often the heart of an online course. This online discussion is structured around a bulletin board or chat tool. The instructor can come up with various topics of discussion and post them at strategic points in the course timeframe. Instructors are encouraged to monitor discussions and sum up key points at the close of discussion.

Many instructors learn that the best questions for initiating ongoing discussions are open-ended enough to allow students to present their personal perspectives. But at the same time, questions need to be focused enough so as not to stray away. One instructor suggests, "You need to have specific tasks to give students some direction. You can't just tell them 'Discuss freely'. You need to think about how the Forum complements other course elements."

Points are allotted for participation. Please inform students how they will be evaluated on the quantity of postings, or the quality of postings, or both.

Case Studies

The case study is an instructional strategy which requires learners to draw upon their past experiences and link them to new knowledge. The instructor provides a scenario (a "story," often real life) that is relevant to course material. Students are asked to structure a report or respond to questions based on the materials. The focus of doing a case study is to make students analyze critically, "pull about," and learn from the scenario.

The key to a successful case study is the selection of an appropriate problematic situation that is relevant both to the interest and experience level of learners and to the concepts being taught. The case should include facts regarding the problem, the environmental context, and the characters of the people involved in the case.

In an online environment, case studies can be presented on web pages and discussed in **Discussions**. The Internet can be used to contribute data and information to case development and analysis.

Problem-based Activity

The instructor presents students with a detailed problem (a scenario or "story line") and students try to solve it. The focus of this activity is on problem-solving skills.

The instructor can start a threaded discussion on the **Discussions**. Students can apply what they have learned from the lecture to justify their solution to the problem. Later, other students can respond to each other's posting. Resources they will need to complete the activity may be provided or students may need to determine on their own what resources they'll need.

Collaborative Discussions

Students are asked to read certain material and then come up with some questions. They are directed to post the questions to a bulletin board and then to collaboratively answer those questions. Students can be split into teams or work as a whole. The instructor usually monitors this type of collaborative discussion lightly. The instructor can redirect if students need to refocus, settle disputes, add a comment to lead them in a new direction, or simply encourage them.

Guest lecturer

The instructor invites a noted expert to "speak" in a "conference" session. For example, an expert can be asked to monitor a bulletin board session for as long as a week, engaging once a day for an hour or two, or whatever timeframe suits. Topics can be sent to students ahead of time.

"Ask an expert"

Students are asked to write an email, asking a question of someone of influence in the field. Students will use concepts and ideas relevant to the course to communicate ideas with the expert. A copy of the letter and the expert's response can be submitted to the instructor.

Brainstorming

Ask students to brainstorm ideas at the beginning of the lesson. It can be a warming-up activity for the lesson. This activity can help students to link their old knowledge to the new knowledge they are going to learn.

Project-oriented Activity

Online projects give students an opportunity to pursue their special interests. Using projects in a learning activity makes the learning more relevant to the learners.

Projects can be done individually or within groups. They can be published and presented on **Discussions** on WebCT. Thus learners will have the opportunity to obtain more diverse viewpoints and feedback from both the instructor and other students